



Connected  
Educators

**DRAFT**

The Connected Educator

# A Profile of Contributions

From Connected Educator Month 2013

# Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction.</b> . . . .	1
<b>What Is a Connected Educator?</b> . . . .	2
Connected Educator Characteristics and Practices. . . . .	3
Value Created for Connected Educators . . . . .	4
Learning Needs, Interests, and Barriers . . . . .	5
<b>How Educators Connect on Twitter</b> . . . . .	6
<b>Best Practices for Becoming a Connected Educator</b> . . . . .	11
<b>The Role of Leadership in Connected Learning</b> . . . . .	12
Good Digital Learning Behaviors . . . . .	12
Develop an Online Presence . . . . .	12
Technology Platforms . . . . .	13
Incentives and Policies for Technology Use . . . . .	13

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*It is the strangers that feed me new ideas, new initiatives, new challenges, that mold me now as a connected educator....[I]t is time to realize that being a connected educator is not just a frivolous choice that somehow feeds my ego. It is time to realize that being connected is something we must model for our students so that they in turn can become true global citizens [who] know there are others to reach out to. So we can bring the world into our classrooms in an authentic manner and model international relationship building. We don't stay connected to self-promote, or to feel better than others because of our connectedness. We stay connected because of what it has done to our teaching, to our thinking and to our students' lives.*

—Pernille Ripp, fifth-grade educator in a [blog post](#)

# Introduction

What does it mean to be a connected educator? This brief focuses on the individual connected educator and what it means to be connected from the viewpoint of those who are engaged in online collaboration. The profile of the connected educator was developed by analyzing data from Connected Educator Month (CEM) 2013. The profile's purpose is to illustrate the value gained by teachers when connected through online communities of practice and social learning networks and simple strategies that others can take to embark on a similar journey. This brief also provides a snapshot of teachers' use of Twitter during CEM 2013, one of many means of connection, to shed light on the topics about which they engaged and the dynamics of their conversations. Finally, it provides suggestions from self-described connected educators and administrators on how district and school leaders can support connected professional learning and collaboration among their staff.

In October 2013, the U.S. Department of Education convened the second annual CEM, bringing together organizations, teachers, thought leaders, and policymakers in a monthlong series of online and blended events that support professional learning. The goal of CEM 2013 was to help districts promote online social learning and determine ways to integrate online collaboration into their formal professional development. The CEM participants—including teachers; librarians; professional development providers; technology coordinators; principals; superintendents; and other school, district, and state leaders—engaged in asynchronous and synchronous interactive webinars, online workshops, open houses, Twitter conversations, and other activities related to six themes that promote the integration of online communities and professional learning:

- Making it count: integrating social learning into formal professional development
- Connected leadership
- Personalized learning
- Innovating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and literacy
- From connection to collaboration
- Twenty-first century classroom management

During CEM 2013, more than 400 groups, including 239 organizations, 183 districts, and 11 states, organized more than 600 education- and technology-related events. Hundreds of thousands of teachers participated in these activities and the associated social media conversations. More than 13 million people were reached on Twitter, with an average of 4.6 million impressions per day on event hashtags, and there were 263,000 blog mentions. Teachers claimed several thousand digital badges, and more than 1,600 joined the [edConnectr](#) network.

The volume and the diversity of the learning opportunities during CEM 2013 suggest that there is no shortage of paths to for professional learning. Teachers engaged with each other and other experts through social media such as Twitter, Google+, Facebook, and LinkedIn; education-specific networks such as [Edmodo](#) and [Schoology](#); online communities such as [Intel Teachers Engage](#), [Classroom 2.0](#), the [Literacy and Learning Exchange](#), and the [Educator's PLN](#) (the personal learning network for educators); and many other platforms. With very little effort across the spectrum of opportunities, teachers can find a resource, a platform, a group, or a community to address most of their needs.

A broad sampling of qualitative evidence from CEM 2013 was collected and analyzed to develop a profile of the connected educator. From this profile, a set of characteristics and practices was distilled to identify strategies that nonconnected educators and education leaders can use to become more connected. In addition, connected educators can use these suggestions to expand the breadth of networks and communities in which they learn, engage more deeply with their current personal learning networks, and assess the quality and the fit of new connected experiences to ensure that they commit time and energy in an informed manner. This sampling includes social media records, such as Tweets using the event hashtags #ce13 and #cem13, blog posts, Twitter transcripts, and edConnectr profiles, as well as individual connected educator profiles from [ConnectedEducators.org](#), [Learning in Burlington](#) (a blog of Patrick Larkin, an administrator at Burlington Public Schools in Burlington, Massachusetts), and the [Fund for Transforming Education in Kentucky](#) (Fund for Kentucky) blog. The latter two profile series were selected because they represented a highly involved CEM 2013 participating district and state, respectively, that provided daily posts throughout CEM 2013.

## What Is a Connected Educator?

Using qualitative data from CEM 2013, we looked at how connected educators<sup>1</sup> define what it means to be connected. CEM 2013 participants shared their experiences and engaged with each other in a variety of formats and forums. The nature of the Twitter platform meant that Twitter responses were short, concise, and alternatively evocative and ambiguous. Numerous teachers composed blog posts, commenting on CEM 2013 events or providing their thoughts about being a connected educator, usually concisely and often at a high level of generality. The CEM 2013 profiles resulted from brief interviews of administrators and other education professionals who were active in using social media and online communities to support their own learning and that of other teachers. The Fund for Kentucky and the Learning in Burlington blogs partnered with connected educators during the month to promote CEM 2013 and highlight effective connected educators. Patrick Larkin issued a call to his Twitter followers, soliciting answers to the following question: “Why do you choose to be a connected educator?” The Fund for Kentucky selected Kentucky teachers to answer four questions, including the following: “In what ways are you a connected educator?” and “What advice or resources do you recommend for teachers becoming connected?” From these different sources, similar but not uniform responses on what it means to be connected emerged and are described in the following subsections.

*Connected means not having all the answers but looking for them, usually with others.*

—Chris Lehman on #edtechchat

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<sup>1</sup> Here, a connected educator is anyone who participated in CEM 2013 events and, therefore, had a comment or a viewpoint represented in Twitter transcripts, blog posts, CEM profiles, or edConnectr data.

## Connected Educator Characteristics and Practices

Thoughts on what it means to be a connected educator were wide ranging, but some common themes emerged.

**Connected Educators Are Lifelong Learners.** Connected educators consider themselves lifelong learners. As Mike Paul (Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 28) noted, “Being connected is a way of life.” Technology is not the focus or drive; rather, each online interaction is a means to grow personally and professionally. The connected educator models the effective use of technology by using things such as Twitter and blogs as activities and resources for lessons. Connected educators encourage the use of social learning networks and online collaboration as a means for continuous knowledge attainment and educational growth.

**Connected Educators Use Online Technologies to Enhance Their Face-to-Face Collaborations.** Connected educators use social media and online collaborations to build relationships within their schools, across their districts and states, and around the globe. Many CEM 2013 participants stressed that technology and virtual relationships serve to enhance their face-to-face networks, not necessarily replace them. Traditional interactions still occur with those in the same building or even within a geographic region; those relationships are important and support an educator’s exploration of new practices and techniques with technology. However, for some teachers, being virtually connected to other teachers provides access to the best in the field and creates instant access to other viewpoints and expertise when needed. For Gretchen Schaefer, who is the only educational technology professor at Husson University (Bangor, Maine), “Connecting with others is the best way to keep up with current info in my field and to find new learning experiences for my students” (Learning in Burlington, Connected Educator Profile Day 9).

**Connected Educators Are Open to New Ideas and Differing Views.** Connected educators are change oriented. They see the value in different views and perspectives. Social networking is used to “find new ideas to share with my colleagues,...[be] challenged to try new things and take risks, [and embrace] failure is an important part of growing and learning” (Heidi Neltner, Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 25). Teachers see this form of connection as a process for learning, growing, and obtaining the best information for students. Alyssa Smith notes the following on her [blog](#):

Sometimes you get new ideas, people [who] share your passions, or simply affirmation and validation. For me it has helped me see my own value in the classroom. I have learned that I have a lot offer others—and it has helped reassure me that teachers everywhere are facing the same struggles. I love to see people’s ideas of how they are making their classrooms and schools successful.

**Connected Educators Share What They Do and Learn in Multiple Ways.** Connected educators engage in multiple modes of connection and communication—such as blogs, Google+ communities, Twitter networks, YouTube Channels, and other methods—to get their message across, develop strategies, find lessons and resources, and contribute to the educational content and knowledge base. Technology platforms are integral to the way connected educators work; they are not merely something extra. They feel a responsibility to get others (e.g., colleagues, other teachers, and students) connected and engaged in the conversation. In her blog post on [How to Become a Connected Educator](#), Nicole Krueger noted that being connected is a two-way street. “Sharing content online—rather than merely consuming it—can help you find like-minded colleagues to collaborate with.”

*Sharing is the key to successful connections. Collaborating is the key to successful ideas. Together, we are smarter than we are individually.*

—Tom Whitby ([ISTE Connects Blog](#))

**Connected Educators Invest in Not Only Their Students but Also the Larger Profession’s Impact on Society.** For the connected educator, online collaboration and networking help teachers translate ideas and theory into practice, not only in their own classrooms but also throughout their schools and districts (Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 21). Some use their connectedness as motivation for involvement in broader policy debates, such as Ali Wright (Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 31), whose personal learning network motivated her to testify to a state legislative committee about the level of school funding.

**Connected Educators Make Connecting a Way of Life.** Those who are not connected may think they do not have the time to add one more thing to their schedules or plan another activity. Connected educators have a different view on this. For them, connection is not an add-on; it is an essential part of their day that enriches both their professional and personal lives. Connected practices have transformed, not simply added to, their approach to instruction and professional learning. That connection can take as much or as little time as the individual wants. In his blog post titled “[The REAL Time Commitment for Being a Connected Educator](#),” Matt Miller explains it this way: “Being a connected educator is the single most important thing I’ve done to transform what I do as a teacher....Some days, I can only invest a few minutes in it. Other days,...the whole day is about becoming a better teacher.” That connection can take the form of posing a question on Twitter between meetings or even while watching television or becoming more involved in a scheduled chat or online event.

Connected educators are as diverse as their interests. Their characteristics and strategies are complex and interdependent, but each is grounded in a passion for their work, a drive to find solutions, and a willingness to engage with a broader community.

## *Value Created for Connected Educators*

A review of the social network data and feedback collected during CEM 2013 events suggests that being a connected educator adds value to participants’ professional practices. The following subsections summarize some of the ways in which connected interactions benefit not only teachers themselves but also their students, their schools, and their profession.

**Global Connections for Students.** Engaging in collaborative social learning is beneficial to not only teachers but also their students. It opens up a world of possibilities that teachers might not otherwise have. For example, one Twitter user commented that by teaching her students digital literacy and the application of Twitter, they are able to virtually connect with the authors of the books they have studied and connect with student counterparts in other geographical regions. They become aware of a broader community beyond the school. Jaime McMillan noted the following: “TweetChat sessions gave my students and me a sense of worldly community connection.... Those who watched our classroom activities unfold online offered help, resources, and even donated more books to my classroom” (Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 23). In her blog [What Is Your Ideal School?](#), Smadar Goldstein talks about how teaching students about current events and headlines is not enough in today’s world of connected learning: “Being a part of a connected world today means that students should not only learn about what is going on in other parts of the world, but [also] seek to understand events, offer opinions and become involved.” Online communities and opportunities for international interactions facilitate this active participation as global citizens.

*Isolation is the enemy of continuous improvement. Being connected helps to eliminate that barrier.*

—Arne Duncan (@arneduncan), while moderating #EdTechChat

**Reduction of Isolation and Connection to New Inspiration.** During his moderation of a Twitter conversation during CEM 2013 (#EdTechChat), U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan noted that being connected eliminates a barrier to continuous improvement. Connected learning and virtual collaboration create a level playing field and bring more people into the universe of thought processes despite geographical and hierarchical boundaries, resulting in a constant stream of new ideas and thought partners. During the same Twitter conversation, one participant commented, “Being connected means I don’t have to know all the answers. Students and I can reach out to experts!” (@thereadingzone). Through networks, online forums, and platforms, connected educators have instantaneous access to information and feedback. As LeRonda Morton noted, “Being connected enhances creativity, generates ideas, allows for extreme collaboration, broadens research opportunities and experimentation, and spurs change” (Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 30).

**New and More Effective Instructional and Administrative Practices.** Being a connected educator enables teachers and administrators to “stay caught up with the changing systems, policies, and procedures that directly impact what we do” (Lindsey Childers, Fund for Kentucky, Connected Educator Profile Day 11). There is instant access to news and updates that may affect learning from the state or district level to the classroom and lesson levels. Resources are available that allow connected educators to constantly refine and improve their instructional practices and approaches.

**Improved School Culture.** Connected learning and social network activities, when incorporated into district and school structures, can help improve school culture. Tom Whitby stated in his [blog](#) that school culture in relation to collaboration and innovation is “the most influential factor in determining the success or failure of that teacher.” Teachers who are open to innovation and change can learn and grow by interacting with those who are already connected. Connected educators have a broader network compared with their individual school communities and can gain access to instructional materials and other resources for their classrooms through virtual connections. This access opens up greater possibilities for teachers to lead and direct their classrooms and what students learn. In addition, connection to other teachers with varying levels of responsibility can provide greater opportunity for professional reflection and growth.

## *Learning Needs, Interests, and Barriers*

Those who are connected understand the value of online learning and collaboration. CEM 2013 provided an opportunity for teachers with a wide range of needs and interests to participate in social learning events that could address some of those needs.

Multiple CEM 2013 data sources pointed to interests and needs for additional learning. Specifically, edConnectr profile data and textual analysis of Twitter conversations not only indicated that connected educators wanted to learn and improve but also pointed directly to topics of high interest and need.

edConnectr served as a matchmaking community for teachers during the month. Members selected descriptive items from lists of prepopulated tags; these items provided basic demographics as well as self-identified areas of need (in terms of gaining professional experience and knowledge), expertise (in terms of the ability to provide help or mentorship to other members), and personal interest. The community infrastructure then identified similarities among members based on their descriptions. Table 1 identifies the top 10 self-selected tags in the areas of expertise and topics of need. Interestingly, six of the top 10 topics on which members reported expertise and for which they identified a need for further learning are the same. This suggests that, at least among the motivated connected educators on edConnectr, those who need or want help in a particular area have a strong ability to connect with other teachers who can provide the needed knowledge and experience.

**Table 1. Top 10 Self-Reported Expertise and Needs of the edConnectr Profiles**

	Expertise	Number Who Selected	Needs	Number Who Selected
1	Blended learning events	216	Blended learning events	206
2	Blogging	251	Blogging	174
3	Classroom management	190	Collaboration	172
4	Collaboration	384	Common Core State Standards	157
5	Connected learning	217	Connected learning	198
6	Instructional strategies	164	Flipped education school-to-home	143
7	Integrating technology in the classroom	386	Inquiry-based education	124
8	Professional development	225	Integrating technology in the classroom	217
9	21st century skills, ISTE Standards	159	New technologies	136
10	Web 2.0 tools	213	Professional development	126



**Figure 1: edConnectr Matching Tool**



During the Twitter conversation with Secretary Duncan, the two most frequent responses to the question about barriers that prevent teachers from being connected were being fearful or intimidated and the fact that being a connected educator is not yet the norm. For those just starting out or who are not yet connected, it can be even more difficult to determine the best sources of information. Online networks, such as edConnectr, are one way to address these barriers while addressing the needs of connected educators at the same time. edConnectr users complete a profile, including their areas of expertise, interests, and topics in which they need help or are lacking knowledge. Users are then visually matched with and able to connect with those who have similar interests or reach out for help on a particular topic. Figure 1 shows edConnectr's visual matching interface.

## How Educators Connect on Twitter

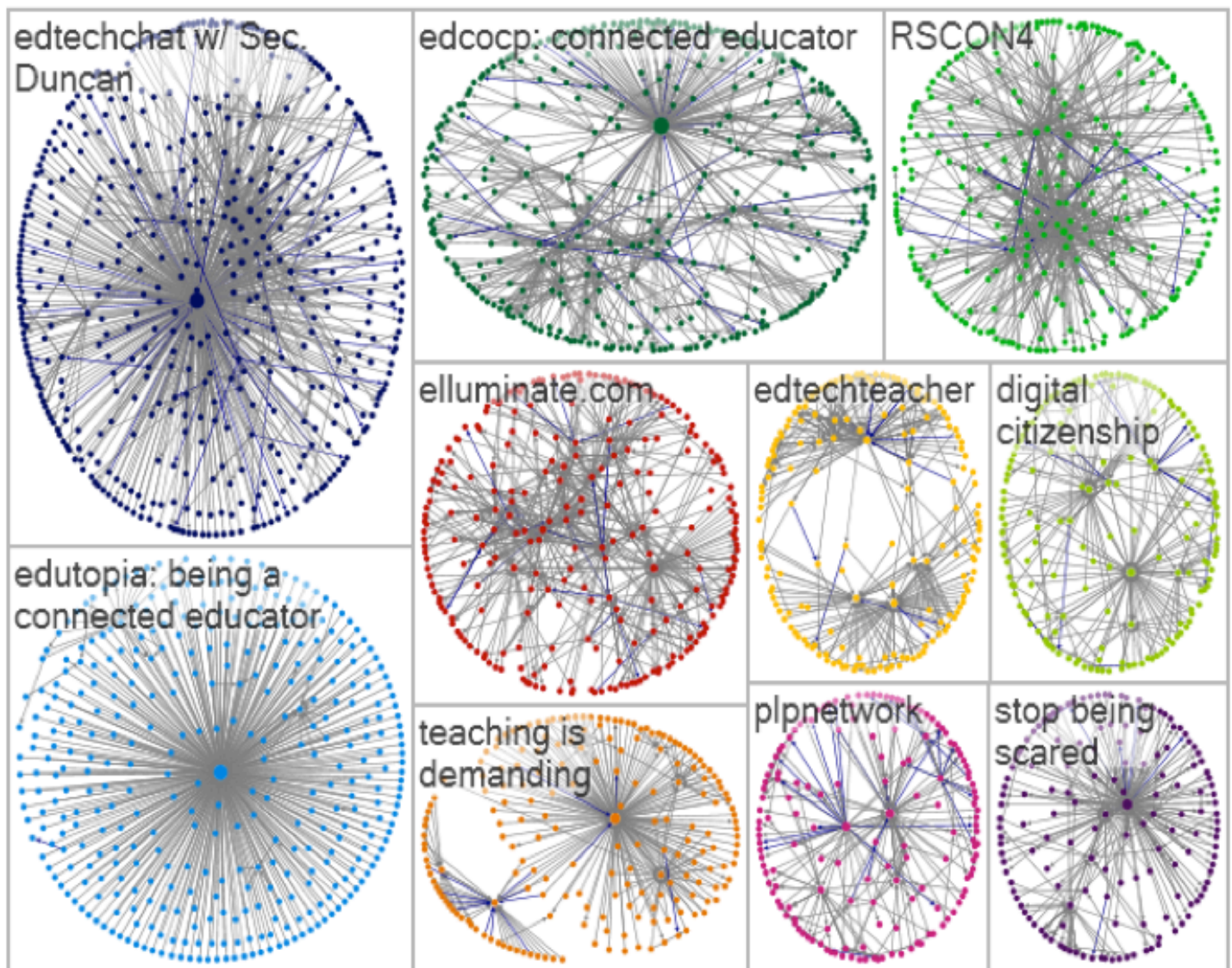
To better understand the content and the dynamics of the Twitter conversations during CEM 2013, tweets were collected using the event hashtags from approximately one half of the days in October 2013. From this data, [NodeXL](#) was used to determine how people connected with each other and CEM concepts. The analysis of these tweets shows a diverse yet cohesive set of topics, unified by their loose correspondence to the major CEM 2013 themes. Although the tweeters coalesced into groups related to ideas, people, and organizations, there was a substantial amount of cross-group chatting. The Twitter conversations suggest that connected educators often have wide-ranging interests and are willing to engage not only within groups of similar teachers but also broadly with a larger network of people who can provide novel perspectives.

Figure 2 is a network diagram of tweets, clustered into groups based on who most frequently interacted with whom.<sup>2</sup> It shows only the largest 10 of 105 groups, which are labeled by a prominent topic extracted from the group chat. Links between groups, which are not shown here, represented 29 percent of the tweets and indicated a high degree of cross-group connection.

Some of these groups were formed from many people mentioning one to four very popular Twitter handles in the group. For example, in the “edutopia: being a connected educator” group, most were responding to a question posted by Edutopia. However, there also are more complex interaction patterns occurring. In the “edcosp: connected educator” group, the intricate pattern of edges indicates a much more decentralized conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Tweets are from October 11–15 and 21–30, 2013. Nodes represent individual tweeters, whereas the edges between them indicate one tweeter replying (blue) or mentioning (grey) the other. Tweeters are grouped by NodeXL using the Wakita-Tsurumi algorithm in a way that tries to maximize intragroup edges while minimizing intergroup edges. This network diagram shows 5,573 tweets among 3,660 tweeters within the largest 10 of 105 groups.

Figure 2. Twitter Network, Showing the Largest 10 of 105 Groups



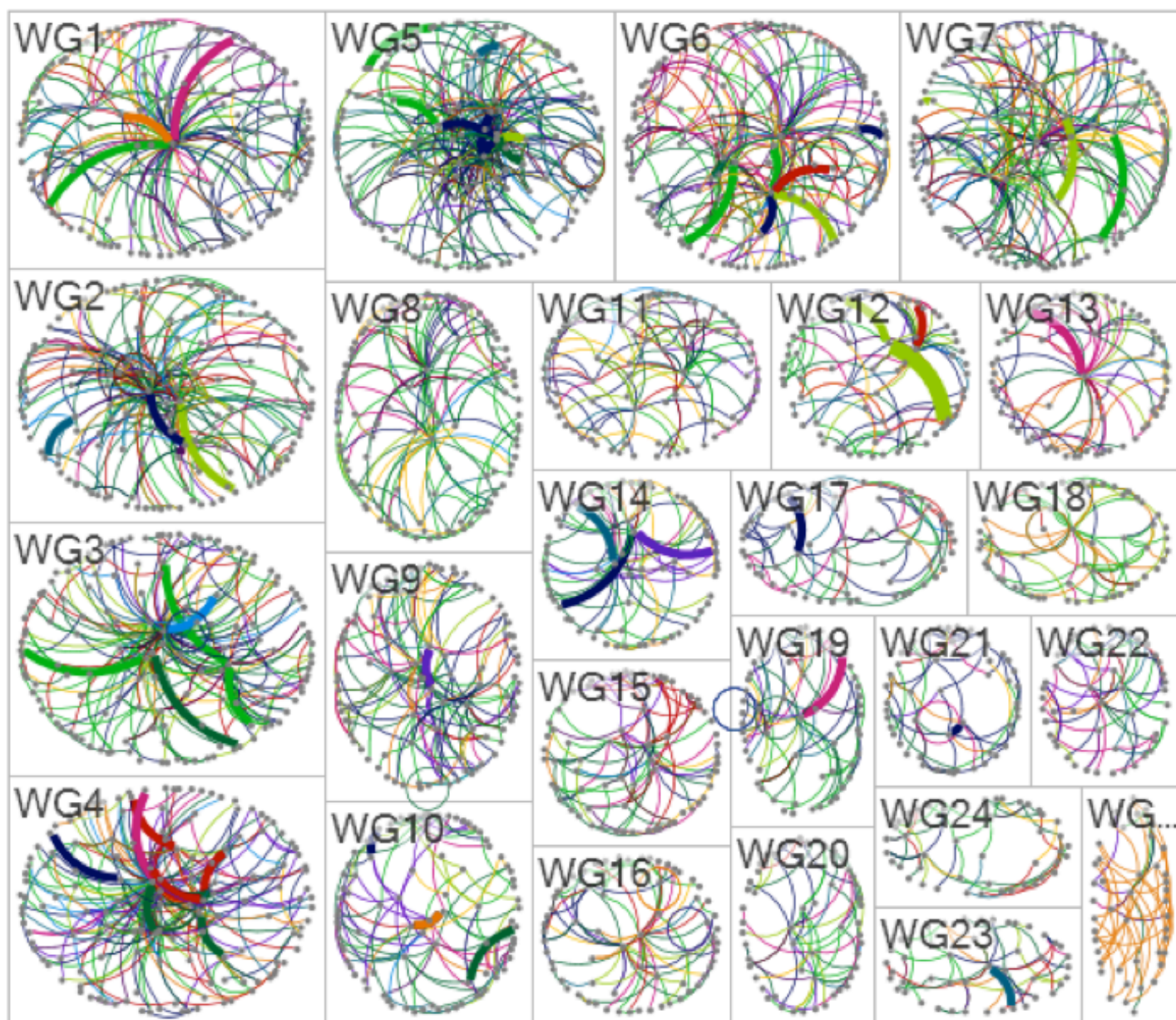
Connections between words within tweets show conversational themes across the whole conversation. Figure 3<sup>3</sup> presents clusters of frequently associated words. Within the groups, colors indicate the groups from Figure 2 from which the tweet authors came. Only one group, the smallest in the figure, showed predominantly one color, suggesting that there were strong interconnections across not only clusters of people but also of topics.<sup>4</sup> This is far from a balkanized conversation, demonstrating connected educators' willingness to engage beyond their familiar circles and comfortable topics.

3 In Figure 3, there is an edge between the two words in any pair of words that co-occur in tweets, as extracted by NodeXL; words are grouped using the same clustering algorithm that was used for the tweeter groups. Intergroup edges are not shown in this figure. Word pairs are associated with the tweeter groups, and the edges are colored to correspond to that of the source tweeter group.

4 Of all 31 word groups, only one showed a strong preponderance of like-colored edges. That small group contained many German words and corresponded to a group of German tweeters.



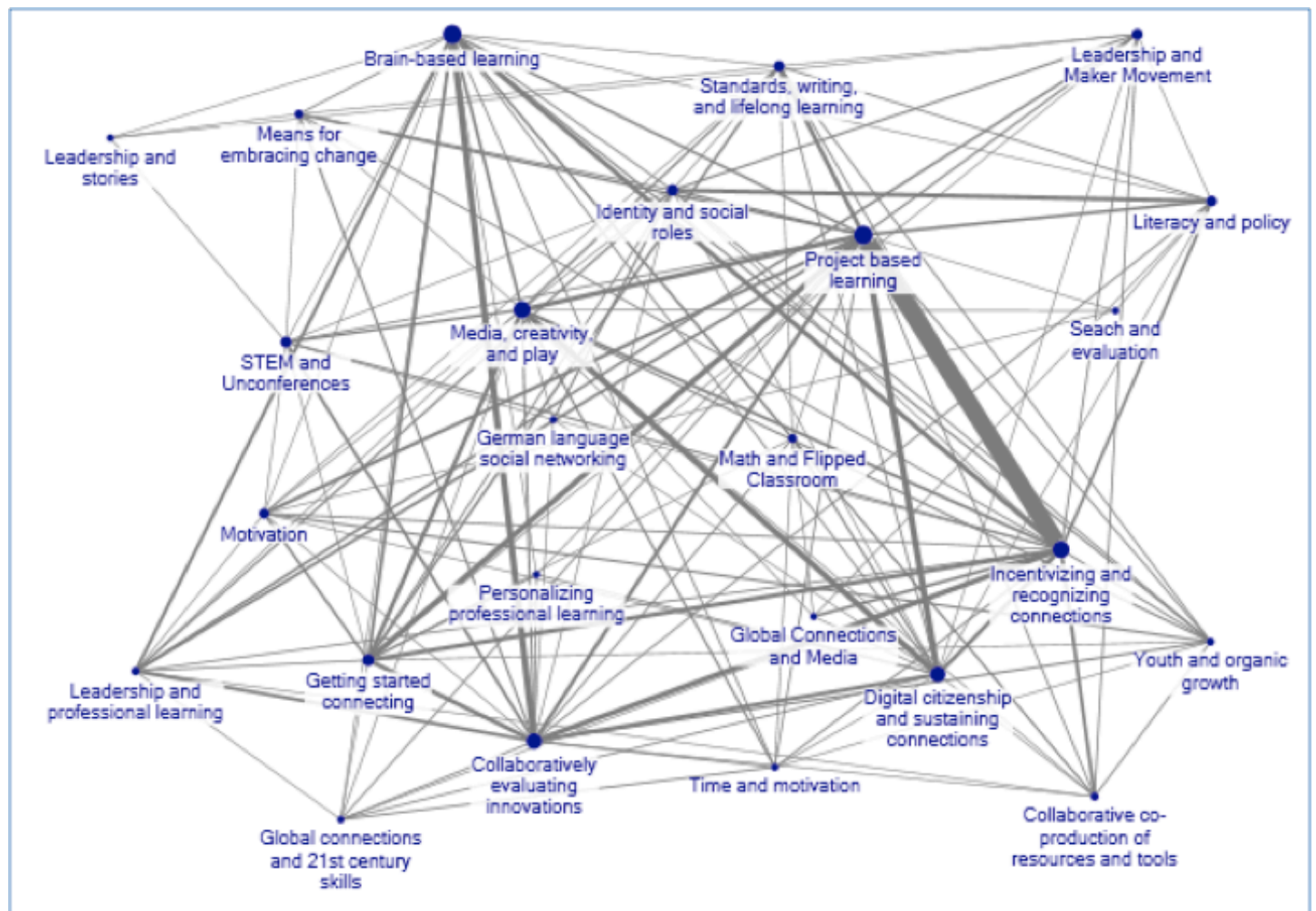
**Figure 3. Groups Within the Network of Word Pairs Found in Tweets**



The words within the top 25 word groups had central themes. Figure 4 shows the groups, labeled with their themes, and the interconnections between words across groups.<sup>5</sup> This is a dense graph—almost one half of all the possible links that could occur among those nodes actually exist. This shows that the themes represented in the Twitter conversations were highly interrelated. Table 2 lists these themes and relates them to the six official CEM 2013 themes. A seventh theme relates to global connections, a frequently discussed topic. The official themes either shaped the content of the discussion or were successful in predicting the general topics that teachers wanted to discuss, but it is probably some combination of the two.

<sup>5</sup> The network in Figure 4 has a collapsed node for each word group Figure 2, labeled with its extracted theme. Edges in this network represent the word pairs across word groups, and their widths are proportional to the number of such pairs.

Figure 4. Themes Extracted From Twitter Word Groups and Their Interconnections



**Table 2. Relating Themes Derived From Twitter Conversations to the Major CEM 2013 Themes**

<b>1. Making It Count: Integrating Social Learning Into Formal Professional Development</b> Incentivizing and recognizing connections Time and motivation
<b>2. Connected Leadership</b> Digital citizenship and sustaining connections Leadership and professional learning Leadership and the Maker Movement Leadership and stories
<b>3. Personalized Learning</b> Motivation Personalizing professional learning Means for embracing change Identity and social roles
<b>4. Innovating STEM and Literacy</b> Standards, writing, and lifelong learning Literacy and policy STEM and Unconferences Mathematics and flipped classrooms
<b>5. From Connection to Collaboration</b> Collaboratively evaluating innovations Collaborative coproduction of resources and tools Search and evaluation Getting started connecting
<b>6. 21st Century Classroom Management<sup>a</sup></b> Brain-based learning Project-based learning Youth and organic growth Media, creativity, and play
<b>[7.] Global Connections<sup>b</sup></b> German language social networking Global connections and media Global connections and 21st century skills

<sup>a</sup> We expanded this global theme to include topics related to 21st century pedagogies and theories of learning and development not explicitly linked to a particular subject area. In most cases, there were strong connections between these topics and those classified under innovating STEM and literacy.

<sup>b</sup> This is not an official CEM 2013 theme, but it emerged from the Twitter conversations.

# Best Practices for Becoming a Connected Educator

Throughout blog posts, Twitter conversations, and connected educator profiles, the various authors suggested best practices and strategies for getting started on the path to online collaboration based on their experiences and observations. Derived from best practices and strategies, the following list suggests action steps that nonconnected educators can take now to engage in online social learning.

- **Start Small and Make the Time.** Choose one thing, such as joining Twitter or reading blogs, and set a dedicated time to focus on that activity daily or even a few times per week as a starting point. A connected educator profiled on the Fund for Kentucky blog noted spending 15–20 minutes each morning looking at his Twitter feed.
- **Follow Personal Passions.** Think about your interests and what you are passionate about and search for networks, social media profiles, blogs, and so on that are of interest. You will be more likely to stick with something you are passionate about, even if it is not directly related to education. Social networks are a broad and diverse universe. You never know what connections other people have that may be of interest to you later on.
- **Don't Be Afraid to Lurk at First.** Join LinkedIn or Twitter and follow a person of interest or a chat and observe until you are comfortable asking a question or engaging. Read a particular blog, follow Pinterest boards, and sit in on a webinar series to observe the interactions and how things work.
- **Engage With and Support Others.** Online communities and social networks thrive only with collaboration. Comment on a blog or respond to someone's question on Twitter but also ask questions, initiate your own line of thinking, and contribute to knowledge to build trust within a professional network. Share and encourage the sharing of resources and information.
- **Be Persistent.** New technologies can take time to understand. If something does not work the first time, look for tip sheets and guides that can help you navigate better and try again.
- **Embrace Social Search.** Build a personal network and use it to help evaluate the quality of learning opportunities. One connected educator started by connecting with his colleagues as a trusted source on social media and building from there. Each person you connect with has the potential to bring the power of his or her personal network into the mix and strengthen the collective knowledge base.
- **Translate Connectedness to the Classroom.** Harness the power of networks such as Facebook, Edmodo, YouTube, Twitter, and others in the classroom. Incorporate social learning into classroom activities. For example, have students research a topic and write a blog to track the class's progress, using comments to encourage interaction and feedback. Keep an open mind, test and experiment, and get creative.
- **Link Face-to-Face and Online Connections.** As one connected educator noted, face-to-face relationships make online interactions more meaningful. Face-to-face and online interactions complement each other and can strengthen the connections and the benefits you receive. Try linking up with the social networks of a professional organization to which you belong. Connecting on social media after a face-to-face meeting at a conference or training can help to reinforce the relationships.
- **Make Connections to School and District Goals.** Advocate for formal recognition of professional learning through online social networks. Some schools and districts, such as Albermarle County Public Schools (Charlottesville, Virginia), give credit for teachers using social media tools to enhance their professional development.
- **Do Something.** The most important thing is not to be afraid of getting connected. Not everything will work for everyone. Try different social networks and work with what feels right to you. Be as connected as you want to be.



*Being connected is no longer an option for educators... We have a responsibility to our kids and schools to collaborate with others to become the best educators possible. As a principal, I feel I must be a role model to teachers in digital learning.*

—Mike Waiksnis, middle school principal, Rock Hill, South Carolina, Learning in Burlington Blog, Connected Educator Profile Day 8

## The Role of Leadership in Connected Learning

Being a connected educator involves a certain amount of individual effort in terms of choosing methods of connection and what is of interest, but the CEM 2013 data demonstrate that principals and district administrators play an important role in encouraging and supporting teachers to become connected educators. Some of the most promising practices for leaders engaging in and supporting other educators' connected learning are described in the following subsections.

### *Good Digital Learning Behaviors*

Engaged principals and other administrators model good digital learning behaviors. Patrick Larkin (Learning in Burlington blog) stated, "I believe that it is the job of educators to remain literate with the tools of the 21st century." This involves administrators using social media and learning tools to enrich their own professional learning as well as that of their school community. Leaders will maintain an active presence on platforms such as Twitter, using it as a means to communicate one-on-one with teachers, parents, and students. Jennie Magiera, digital learning coordinator for the Academy of Urban School Leadership within the Chicago Public Schools, stressed that school or district staff need to "Participate! Model connected education by doing it. Tweet, join a discussion board, listserv or online learning group. Share your experience by blogging, presenting or sitting down with a team of teachers and showing them what you do, how you do it and why you do it." School announcements can be quickly disseminated online, formal professional development sessions can be followed up with online questions and answers, and student work observed during instructional rounds can be shared online to show student progress.

### *Develop an Online Presence*

Develop an online presence for the school or district. Administrators who have been successful in supporting connected learning among teachers and schools have started Twitter and Facebook pages to interact with the school community. Creating regular Twitter conversations and other online events for the school community to interact with staff about particular topics or community interests encourages openness and engagement. If you are encouraging teachers to incorporate online social learning activities into their work, they will need time to engage in social learning. Eric Sheninger, a principal from New Milford, New Jersey, created specific planning times, referred to as professional growth periods, twice per week to allow teachers the time needed to engage in whatever online social learning activities interest them ([ConnectedEducator.org](http://ConnectedEducator.org) interview). This allows teachers the freedom to connect during a set time without taking time away from other priorities.

*We held workshops for our teachers and parents for using social media. We created blogs to tell our stories of being connected educators. By being transparent and using Twitter, Facebook, Diigo, and our school website, we got the word out to our school community and educated them as well about the importance of connected education.*

—Shannon McClintock Miller, teacher librarian, author, and speaker

## Technology Platforms

Provide technology platforms that integrate with professional development and learning. Create collaborative spaces to go along with professional development training or create a Twitter hashtag that can be used to continue discussion on a particular topic.

## Incentives and Policies for Technology Use

Teachers who are invested in the process and the content will likely find their own value in being a connected educator; however, providing incentives, if possible, can encourage nonadopters to join in. Assigning credit to professional development activities conducted virtually or using digital badges as rewards for different types of engagement gives value to the work and encourages participation.

Inviting increasing technology into schools may necessitate establishing or revising current policies for technology use within school settings. In his guest post for *Education Futures* (an *Education Week* blog), Christopher Rogers noted that the school policy on technology use, which was established in 2006, specifically forbids social media use during school hours. To encourage incorporation and the effective use of technology by school staff and students, policies such as these need to be updated for current educational use by unblocking social media sites and focusing on teaching and learning of responsible online interactions for both staff and students. Much discourse on being connected talks about the fear of the unknown by teachers, administrators, and parents. Addressing the proper usage of technology tools and platforms can open the door for easier acceptance of these as educational tools. Teachers, students, and parents should be aware of the guidelines and approved tools and platforms so that technology use and digital learning can be most effective.

To support leaders who want to go further in integrated learning through online communities and social networks into formal support for professional development and collaboration, Connected Educators has developed the *Moving Toward the Goal Toolkit*,<sup>6</sup> which includes examples and tools for connecting the work of connected educators to school improvement and integration goals.

Modeling the use of social media tools, remaining open to innovation, and providing supports for teachers can do a lot to encourage connected educators among school staff. Individual connected educators will likely identify with many of the best practices presented in this brief, and they may find ways to expand their personal learning networks, refine their approach to connected professional learning, and become leaders in their buildings and organizations as their professional practices and beliefs are validated. Aspiring, and even reluctant, teachers not yet connected can use the strategies suggested here to experiment with connected online professional learning and plan their growth. Together, new and experienced connected educators, along with those who support them, can continue the wide ranging and strongly integrated conversations about the future of education evidenced by CEM 2013 to better prepare today's students for tomorrow's world.

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6 Rasmussen, C., Cambridge, D., Perry, M., Nussbaum-Beach, S., Green, C., & Perez-Lopez, K. (2014). *Moving toward the goal toolkit*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.





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